Katina Frolek

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A very wise educator named William Arthur Ward once said, “The mediocre teacher tells; the good teacher explains; the superior teacher demonstrates; the great teacher inspires.” Although this may be viewed as a powerful academic statement, one may ask how this idea connects to the new literacies of adolescent literature in this day and age. Furthermore, one might wonder what the term “new literacies” means and question how it is being incorporated into the educational environment. Many reservations can arise about this topic that seems to elude or intimidate some educators. Fortunately, I have discovered that the answer is as simple as face your fears. I had the opportunity to do just this through the creation of my own digital project called [Top of the Mountain](http://dreamdesigndisplay.wikispaces.com).

First, let’s look into the meaning of the new literacies. Although definitions may vary, the idea remains consistent: New literacies include the ability to navigate through the continuous changes of literacies and apply those changes to aspects of reading, writing, viewing, listening, and communicating in the world today. In this day and age, using multimodal approaches in the classroom allows for more constructive and authentic learning experiences. It’s obvious that children today are learning more about literacy outside of school, and the classroom is racing to keep up with the ever-changing world of multimedia. “For students, YouTube, iPods, cell phones with still, video, and audio capabilities, and other digital devices are not new; they are the everyday tools used to communicate in or navigate their worlds” (Albers, 2008).

Currently, there is an unbounded growth in technology that is allowing us to do things that were not possible before. This growth “creates space for us to move beyond where we are now to allow for greater participation, collaboration, and distribution of knowledge” (Albers, 2008). With this in mind, it is vital to understand that the shift in thinking about literacy is more than just a move from a verbal or written expression to a visual or digital expression; it becomes necessary to consider how identities get embedded into such representations.

In order to better understand the concepts of the new literacies, a teacher must know the difference between the myths and realities of adolescent literature. As stated in Adolescents and Digital Literacies, “Students who struggle with one literacy will have difficulty with all literacies” (Kajder, 2010). Although this may have been a believable reality in the past, today it is an absolute myth. As a teacher, a way to improve your foundation of knowledge is to participate in continuous education. It is also important to reflect and define your own beliefs and find ways to make yourself more inspiring. This will not only connect you to the reality of our world, but it will connect you to the students who are living in this reality every day.

Many of us who are considered “digital immigrants” may feel overwhelmed at the idea of incorporating digital literacies and multimodal activities into our classroom. It’s not that we don’t want to, but it’s difficult to know where to begin. Some of us, myself included, may still be asking, “What can I make this (digital tool) do,” rather than focusing on the more applicable question, “What do I *want* this tool to do” (Kadjer, 2010). As I have learned from our class, *Teaching Adolescent Literature and the New Literacies*, taking it one step at a time and scaffolding the material can encourage a positive and successful experience. Creating a plan to gradually learn about the variety of digital tools available will keep the information clear and relevant. Each project I have completed during this class has been a powerful new experience in my understanding of the new literacies.

Our first project focused on thematic braidings, which takes one of the various themes in a novel and creates personal connections, worldly connections, and connections to other literature. This project was produced using Google Docs, which is a fairly simple program where slides are created using words and images. I also learned how to use Flickr to find copyright free images. This particular assignment was interesting because it utilized my critical thinking skills, which included identifying a theme, making connections, and producing a slide show using images and text. This thematic braiding assignment unquestionably resonates with the common core standard RL 6.2-Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details;  provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

The second project was a Character Sketch Journal using Voice Threads, where I chose a character from our novel Smile, by Raina Telgemeier, and created an audio journal based on the thoughts of this character. To begin with, I utilized my creative writing skills to compose a written narrative. Then, I employed my emotional side to show feeling and become like the voice of the character. I also searched for relevant images to add visual impact to the project. This was a fun assignment that encouraged me to use a level of authentic creativity that I have rarely ever used in a school project. It compelled me to take on the perspective of the character and inspired my emotional creativity. One common core standard that applies to this concept is SL 2.5-Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

The third assignment was a digital poem based on the novel Wonder, by R.J. Palacio. I published the poem on YouTube, using iMovie to create it. I have never tried iMovie before and I found myself using various problem-solving skills to compose this project, which seemed to be equal parts creative writing and digital production. The poetry part of this activity is one that can be seen in many classrooms; poetry is a popular subject that touches on many common core standards, such as SL 2.5-Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Using a digital tool to present the poem is what made this activity authentic and engaging. I have composed poems before, writing them nicely and perhaps drawing a picture to represent my words. However, since I am not a great artist, I found it difficult to create anything that I liked or was really proud of. IMovie, however, allowed me to control the words and use images along with music to greatly enhance the feeling and movement of the poem. “Drawing on the various modalities available to them through new media, the students gave voice to their poems and were empowered to unleash their creativity” (Hughes and John, 2009). I definitely felt it was easier to represent my thoughts and feelings using a tool like iMovie because there are endless possibilities and limitations to my creativity.

The fourth and final project I created for this class was a Public Service Announcement. The PSA took all of the knowledge I had learned thus far and required me to apply it to this production. IMovie was used again to create the PSA, but this time, I incorporated text, images, video, music, and voice. Although it was time consuming, the final product was a truly authentic creation because I used my own critical thinking and problem solving skills to research and construct this multimodal composition. I utilized skills in creative writing, persuasion, expression, and production and I feel a real sense of accomplishment for all that I have learned.

Each of these projects was a new learning experience for me. I admit before I understood the digital tools we worked with, I was hesitant at the thought of having to learn how to use them, let alone teach and incorporate them into my lessons. I like how Denise Stuart put it when he said, “Although technology may not appear to be an easy fit for the English language arts classroom, integrating the two can greatly enhance and enrich literature response work as students expand their capacity to interpret” (Stuart, 2012). It is clear to see that utilizing various modalities in the classroom can create differentiation, not only within instructional strategies, but within assessment as well.

In hindsight, every aspect of these projects held me accountable for my own learning and encouraged me to think outside of the box. “Composing through image, sound, movement…these are unique in how they communicate, which should result in a different kind of commentary and content from students as they aren’t confined to what they can do through print” (Kadjer, 2010). With guidance, each student deserves the chance to explore, create, and learn without limitations. Compared to the all too familiar one-dimensional instruction some of us have experienced in the past, the new literacies encourage variety, diversity, and infinite opportunities. This, in my opinion, is a much-needed change and a breath of fresh air.

I found the process of creating all of these projects and their end results to be much more interesting and fun compared to the usual book reports, worksheets, or essays that might be typically assigned in an English classroom. It took time to learn each digital tool and took critical thinking to spark creativity, but I was actively engaged the entire time and have a remarkable sense of pride for my finished products. I can honestly say that I have experienced first-hand what it means to have an authentic learning experience, and it is one I will surely never forget. I will aspire to give my students the opportunity to create their own understanding of real-world applications and provide a place where they are truly engaged in what they are learning.

**References**

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